

PFLAG Edmonton

February 1997

NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, February 18, 1997

7:30 pm

Suite 103, 10612 - 124 St.

(Parking is available both at the back of the building and on the street.)

Everyone welcome! Coffee and treats will be served.

For more information please call:

Chairperson: Lynne, [REDACTED]
Newsletter Editor: Ellen, [REDACTED]

Mail may be forwarded to:
[REDACTED]

Contributions to the newsletter are warmly welcomed and much appreciated. Thanks to all of you who have previously sent articles and notices in.

PFLAG Business Meeting

A second monthly meeting is held in which PFLAG looks after its organizational and

business affairs. This is held the first Tuesday of each month at



7:00 pm at the Gay & Lesbian Community Centre Board room.

Voting privileges are restricted to paid up members of good standing with PFLAG. Visitors and guests have no vote, but are encouraged to participate or observe as they choose.

Coffee and treats are also served at this monthly meeting!

The next business meeting will be March 4, 1997. See you there.

PFLAG MISSION

Keeping families together is the mission of PFLAG. Our family values stress education, understanding, acceptance and support, but most of all *love*, thereby empowering our children - straight and gay - to lead happy and productive lives.

OUR NEW PFLAG SUBGROUP - TGS!

by Roxanne Hurd-Pride

Background

- **1981** - PFLAG was founded as a support network for the families and friends of lesbians and gays;
- **1994** - PFLAG was expanded to include bisexuals;
- **1996** - In November TGS-PFLAG was nationally recognized, although a number of groups had already taken this initiative. (TGS stands for Transgendered Support)

This subgroup is fronted primarily by two people: Emily Rizzo from New York maintains TGS-PFLAG's list server and Mary Boenke, a social worker from West Virginia, looks after administration. In November, Mary put out a call on the net looking for a volunteer from each chapter to represent the transgendered subgroup. I responded to Mary, sent a brief biography of my activities and asked to represent Edmonton. Mary responded enthusiastically but noted that other Canadians had not responded to the call and so she asked if I would be interested in heading up the initial organization of TGS-PFLAG in Canada. I said, "Yes" and this is where we're at.

Current Plans

As a first step I will be contacting all the Canadian chapters, informing them of the new subgroup and asking them to select a person to represent transgendered issues. After that has happened, then we will start working on outreach programs and education. I hope to travel to the other western Canadian chapters this spring and summer to meet the tgs reps. I also hope to be involved in all of our outreach programs. Further I hope to ensure that our current literature and correspondence make reference to transgendered persons, as well as gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

This winter I have been in contact with a PFLAG organizer in northern Montana who put out a call on the net asking for a transgendered person to come to

a conference in Great Falls as in her words, "we don't seem to have any active transgenderists in this area." I contacted Starshine ...who has arranged for me to meet with the PFLAG groups in northern Montana on April 29, 1997 and also to attend some Gay Pride events. We have been invited to present a workshop at PFLAG's regional conference which is being held this year in Idaho Falls on the weekend of May 3 & 4, 1997. Stephanie Lynn Russell, who spoke for us at Grant MacEwan, will be accompanying me on this trip. We hope to make some presentations about how transgendered persons cope in society and about coming out issues, but our main goal is just to meet other PFLAGers and heighten awareness about transgendered persons in general.

All the best to Roxanne and Stephanie from PFLAG Edmonton.



Speakers Bureau

Our Speakers Bureau was quiet during the month of January, perhaps just as well with temperatures in the low minus 20's C.

February 4 - A panel including a father of a gay son, a straight sister of this gay son, a lesbian

PFLAG Edmonton

youth and a gay youth from OUTreach spoke with Planned Parenthood moderator/educator Tracy, to a university Family Studies class of about 100 students about their unique "coming out" experiences. Each one described what obstacles they faced in coming out to family, friends and co-workers as well as the great feeling of freedom experienced in being "out" of the proverbial "closet".

PFLAG SUPPORT

Simple Joys

by Sheron A. Rosen

(Courtesy PFLAG Fresno Newsletter via Houston's PFLAG Flyer)

Why do we cry when our children come out and tell us their secret?

I suspect we shed some tears of grief, some tears of shock, and many tears because we know that the world today is not quite ready to treat our gay sons and daughters fairly. We cry because we know their lives will be even harder than they otherwise might be. We cry because we know there are those who would harm our flesh and blood just because they are who they are. We cry because their lives, their plight, their lot is out of our hands. We cry because we cannot protect them from the injustice we fear they will know. We cry - and then we dry our tears.

They are our children. We love them. We resolve to be there for

them. We kiss and hug them - and then we go back to our lives, our jobs. So I dried my tears and went back to work - and no one knew my secret. I was a teacher then, helping young people to learn. I worked for a hunger relief organization, helping others, total strangers, to eat.

And I loved my son and I walked around with the gnawing pain of knowing how others would so harshly judge him - not on his character, not on his intellect or talent, not on his humanity; but by whom he might love.

Sometimes the pain made me writhe in my sleep. Sometimes the discomfort was overwhelming. But I went back to my life (my job, my husband).

Monday mornings at work I could talk freely with my colleagues about my weekend - a simple pleasure I knew my son would be denied. On my desk a picture of my family - another simple joy probably not there for my son. And every morning before leaving for work there was the newspaper. I read and re-read every article about gay issues. Mostly they added to my anguish - gay rights equated with special rights, policies like, "don't ask, don't tell", and gay bashing. It all seemed so ludicrous to me.

Straight people have no such restrictions on their speech, and no fear of harassment for holding hands in public places - more simple joys denied to my son.

Pain heals with time, I thought. But I was wrong. Every time I kissed my husband "so long" at

the airport, a sign flashed in my head: DENIED TO MY SON. Each time we take a walk, holding hands, that same sign screams: DENIED TO MY SON. The pain and frustration, though less immediate now, grows as my awareness grows.

I've learned a lot from my gay son - lessons of immeasurable worth. I've learned about dignity, courage and truth. I've flung the doors open. My son is not a secret. He is just who he is. I am proud of him and I love him.

I volunteer for PFLAG. I want my son to know the simple joy's that I have known. I want to leave this world a better place for him. That will be my greatest simple joy.

I know that what is, is not what should be. I know that oppression can only survive through silence. I will not be silenced. I am empowered and PFLAG has given my single voice the volume to be heard.

My anguish has turned to energy and the discomfort transformed into decision. I have dried my eyes. The tears have turned into triumph fortified with the knowledge that I can make a difference. I sleep well at night now.

Please join me and help give all of our children, sons and daughter, brothers and sisters, friends and colleagues, the same simple joys you've known all your lives.



STUDY EXPOSES HOMOPHOBIC VIOLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS

(<http://www.youth.org.80/loco/PERSONProject/Alerts/report.html>)

The 1996 annual report of the *Safe Schools Anti-Violence Documentation Project* in Washington State shocks readers with the degree of un-reported gay-harassment and gay-violence in Washington schools.

Considering Canada has the third highest youth suicide rate in the world, and the Alberta youth suicide rate is well above the Canadian average, is it not likely that our Alberta youth experience more un-reported violence than those in Washington state?

The anti-violence survey revealed:

- 34% of gay/lesbian/bisexual students have suffered anti-gay harassment at school;
- for every gay, lesbian or bisexual student who reported being the target of anti-gay school harassment, 4 heterosexual youth reported the same, having been perceived as gay or lesbian;

- 1995-96 shows a significant increase in parents reporting harassment of their children.

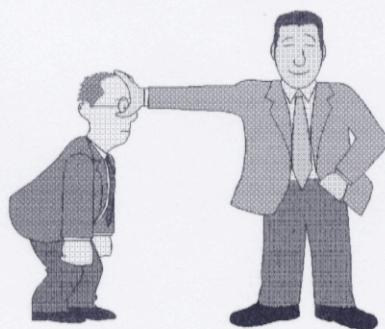
The Safe Schools Coalition, a statewide coalition of youth and education organizations ...spoke of the devastating effect (anti-gay sexual) harassment has on students in elementary, middle and (senior) high schools, and called for prevention and education starting as early as elementary school.

...among 77 incidents reported in the survey, there were seven gang rape incidents in which a total of nine children and teens were raped. In only one case were the school authorities and police informed of the rape, but in many cases school personnel were aware of the harassment that preceded the rape."

There were 15 other physical assaults with four of the assaulted children and teens treated in emergency rooms and one hospitalized. In twelve other physical and sexual assaults, students were spit at, things were thrown at them and, in some cases their clothing was pulled down or off. Thirty other cases of on-going verbal harassment have involved repeated public humiliation, vandalism, graffiti or the issuing of death threats.

Of those students identifying themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual, 75% more reported feeling unsafe at school (than heterosexual students)

6% of heterosexual students report experiencing anti-gay harassment at school and they also show significantly higher risk for assault, suicidal thoughts, and diminished school performance than heterosexual youth who have not been harassed (on the basis of assumed sexual orientation)



"These are landmark studies. We have never before had this level of evidence or depth of understanding about the problem of anti-gay sexual harassment and violence in schools. Now we know that harassment and assault is widespread, that it is not just urban, that it starts in elementary school that everybody is vulnerable....We know that those who are sexual minorities, or who are attacked because someone thinks they are sexual minorities, are at dramatically increased risk of missing school out of fear, of abusing alcohol or other drugs, and of considering or attempting suicide."

PFLAG Edmonton

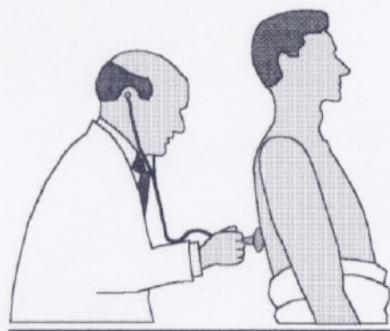
Tawney Collin-Feay, co-president of the Seattle chapter of PFLAG,...said the harassment and violence reported ..."is the truth of too many children's stories. The bright, hopeful, innocent faces that they start out with become clouded with anxiety and fear as they start to realize that the names, the jokes, the mocking, might apply to them.....**The difference for our gay children is that this is an officially sanctioned cruelty.** Not from every classroom, but from too many; not on every playground but on too many; not from every pulpit, but from too many -- we see the hopeful innocence fade into a self-hatred that is as fatal as it is inevitable." She asked that learning in an atmosphere of dignity and safety be the birthright for all children.

Tom Page, co-chair of the Safe Schools research team...introduced film clips from *It's Elementary*, a film made by Academy Award-winner Deborah Chasnoff. According to Chasnoff, "Most adults probably don't see why school should teach young children about gay people, and they can't imagine how teachers could possibly present this subject in an age-appropriate way. We made this film to explore what does happen when experienced teacher talk about lesbians and gay men with their students."

In past years, the Safe Schools Coalition has recommended policy changes, staff training and equitable discipline of offenders as ways to prevent

anti-gay harassment in schools. This year the recommendations go further. Page said, **"In light of these research findings, we are now asking schools to teach about prejudice, to dispel stereotypes and to provide accurate information about gay and lesbian people. It's Elementary shows this can be done. The children need our help.**

Editor's Note: PFLAG
Edmonton has 2 copies of the *It's Elementary* video available for loan to educators. (Phone: [REDACTED] Ellen)



Alberta Doctor's Homophobia Denounced

(Condensed from The Edmonton Journal, January 16, 1997)

Dr. Hill, a Reform party MP, argued in the House of Commons in May, 1996, that human rights protection for homosexuals would promote "an unhealthy lifestyle" with medical effects ranging from HIV to lower life expectancy. Eight months later the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons decided that Hill's comments

were "factually accurate and not discriminatory".

The findings of the Alberta college were not of great importance because.....Hill's comments have already been condemned by the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Association of Family Physicians.

Dr. Phillip Berger, chief of the Department of Family and Community Medicine at Toronto's Wellesley Hospital, had earlier called on Alberta medical authorities or the Reform party to discipline Hill. "In my opinion, the college in Alberta is as backward and as wrong in its thinking as Dr. Hill is," he said in an interview.

But the findings of the Alberta college were not of great importance because Hill has already been "held to account by his peers." His comments have been condemned by the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Association of Family Physicians.

Catholic Cardinal Supports Gays & Lesbians from "Beyond the Grave"

(Courtesy PFLAG Calgary Newsletter)

The Windy City (Chicago) Gay Chorus sang at the wake of

PFLAG Edmonton

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin in St. Mary's Cathedral in Chicago. The chorus had been personally invited by the cardinal three weeks before his death.

The invitation is a spectacular commentary by Bernardin from the grave, calling for reform of official Catholic church policy to include Gays and Lesbians. Because of political pressure and arm twisting from the Vatican, Bernardin was unable to make that statement during his lifetime.

The gentle criticism of the Vatican's anti-Gay policy was clear to the hundreds of bishops and cardinals from around the world who attended the ceremony.

"It was a conscious act of the cardinal to do outreach to the Gay community," said Marianne Duddy, president of Dignity, a national organization for Gay and Lesbian Catholics. "This was a magnificent gesture to let it be known that he acknowledged the presence of Gay and Lesbian people within the church community."

"The church hierarchy has really tried to draw a pretty tight circle on what's OK and not OK to do," Duddy said. "By giving the Windy City Gay Chorus such a prominent role in his wake, **Cardinal Bernardin was saying for the last time that we need to draw a wider circle.**"

Bernardin died November 14, 1996, of pancreatic cancer. He was 68. (Washington Blade)



EVENTS CALENDAR

7th Annual Black & White Affair

March 8, 1997

Commerce Place, Downtown

Fans of the Black & White affair will know what to expect from the event - great music, creative silent auction items, dancing, smart martinis, and, of course, seeing and being seen!

And this year the *Affair* continues to grow with the addition of *A Prelude to an Affair*, a dinner featuring an exclusive performance by soprano Iren Bartok...a rapidly rising star who has performed in *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats*, *Madama Butterfly* and *La Boheme*. The Prelude will host only 120 guests and in addition to the recital, includes dinner, cocktails and admission to the Black and White Affair.

For further information and tickets, please phone:

Ticketmaster at 451-8000 or Aids Network at 448-5742.

GMOC 1997 Winter Workshops

Coming Out in the 90's

Wednesdays, Feb 19 to March 26, 1997
7 - 10 pm

St. Stephen's College
U of A Campus

This is one of the best of the workshops. It is less structured than the others, allowing the attendees to set the topics. From the experiences and needs of the men in the workshop, the topics discussed will range through coming out to parents, to co-workers, and to friends; relationships, self-acceptance and a whole lot more. It is by far the best course to take if this is your first time.

Being Gay in the 90's

Thursdays, Feb 20 to April 19
7 - 10 pm

St Stephen's College
U of A Campus

More structured than *Coming Out in the 90's* with such topics covered as the history of the local community; What is a gay community? AIDS; spiritual, social, political aspects of gay life; risk-taking. If one of the topics covered in this course is not your cup of tea, don't feel bad about not saying a word for the whole three hours. It's okay just to listen sometimes.

PFLAG Edmonton

Men Meeting Men

Wednesdays, April 16 to May, 7, 1997
7 - 10 pm

St. Stephen's College
U of A Campus

This course can be fun, and serious, and a little more difficult to get comfortable in for some. It will cover love, relationships, sex, where and how and when to meet a guy and how to maintain a relationship. Some of the exercises you will be asked to do are rather poorly designed and worded, but you should be able to live through them. If you take either of the other two courses first then this one will be easier to do.

To Register:

Phone the AIDS Network, 488-5742, and ask for Kirk (9 to 5, Monday through Friday). This will give you a chance to ask any questions you have before deciding to register.

Graham,
(Gay Men's Coffee Evenings)

OUTreach

A social and political organization on the University of Alberta campus. Meets 5:00 pm, Mondays at Athabasca Hall.

Phone: [REDACTED]

Lesbian Lifeline

Phone: [REDACTED]

It's a Gay Life!

February 1997

GLAD TO BE GAY!

(Courtesy of *Perceptions*, Sept. 13, 1995)

I was having a discussion with a friend a while back and during our dialogue I asked him what being gay meant to him. After thinking for a few moments, he replied that to him being gay meant oppression, discrimination and fear. I was taken aback by his response, but after thinking about it I could see where he was coming from. All too often we focus mainly on the negative aspects of being gay or lesbian instead of looking at the other side.

For me, being gay means many things and I have reached a point in life where most of those things are positive. Unfortunately, I'm not dissimilar to other people and don't always look at the many things I love about being gay. I think our community doesn't spend enough time looking at those things that are a wonderful part of being gay or lesbian.

Unfortunately, I'm not dissimilar to other people and don't always look at the many things I love about being gay.



We live in a society that dictates many rules that we are supposed to live with. There are a plethora of rules about how I, as a man, should act, feel and be based on how I should relate to the world around me. Dealing with my gay feelings has forced me to examine not only myself but also those rules that are so pervasive in our society and so constricting. Because those rules were developed for heterosexual men and non-gay lifestyles I've had to examine those rules and develop my own set of rules for my life. That process has largely

freed me from the constraints of conventional society and allowed me to express myself in ways that are more akin to who I am. I doubt if that would have happened if I wasn't gay.

Being gay has opened up many possibilities for me. I don't have to buy into the mythology about men being strong and not having feelings. I don't have to accept the rules about how men relate to women and as a result I have developed many close and intimate relationships with women that are free of the sexual dynamics that often dog non-gay men and women. I have discovered that I can be intimate and open with other men and that I can openly love them.

...I would not give up the past 25 years for anything. Being gay or lesbian allows us to be pioneers or to utilize our creative energy in ways that we find fulfilling.

Being gay has allowed me to escape the confines of conventional marriage. I can develop relationships with men, and women, that meet my needs. Not having to support a wife and

children has meant that I can do the work that I feel drawn to rather than worry about having to secure an income that will take care of my family. There is no way I could have worked as a gay activist for the past 25 years if I had to worry about supporting a wife and kids.

Working in the lesbian and gay community does not exactly pay well, if it pays at all, but I would not give up the past 25 years for anything. Being gay or lesbian allows us to be pioneers or to utilize our creative energy in ways that we find fulfilling.

One of the biggest joys that being gay has brought me has been the opportunity to know, work with, and love men and women from a huge cross-section of society. Knowing those people has enriched my life immensely. If I wasn't gay my circle of friends and acquaintances would most likely be drawn from my field of employment, my church or some other confined area. Instead, I spend time with a wide range of creative and exciting people, people who are creating lives that are largely based on what they want and need instead of based on what society expects of them.

Yes, there are times being gay can be a real pain.

Discrimination, oppression, fear and loneliness are part of the community that I love, work and play in. I am constantly aware that my community has more than its share of health and social problems but those problems don't arise from being

gay or lesbian. They result from a society and culture that demands conformity and sameness. But life for heterosexual men and women isn't always a bed of roses either, if they buy into most of the regulations of life that our society rams down our throats.

I wouldn't want to be heterosexual for anything in the world. It isn't who I am and it isn't what I want. *I'm glad to be gay.*

I have discovered that by embracing my gayness and having pride in what I feel and who I am that I can overcome the discrimination and oppression and I certainly don't need to be fearful. Being proud of who I am and how I love and feel has been liberating for me. I wouldn't want to be heterosexual for anything in the world. It isn't who I am and it isn't what I want. I'm glad to be gay. It has opened up a world of creativity, exploration and love that I doubt would have been visible to me if I was heterosexual and living within the confining rules that are proffered by our society.

Being gay or lesbian can be a liberating experience if we allow it to be. Being gay or lesbian doesn't have to mean fear, oppression and discrimination. It can mean many wonderful things if we allow it.

.....by Gens Hellquist

It's a Gay Life!

Morningside

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160 acres of peace & seclusion

Call hosts Heather & Cathy:

Ph. (403) 878 - 3301

March 14 - 16 Workshop:

Building & Creating

with Willow

